

Message Text

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ACTION IO-13

INFO OCT-01 AF-08 ARA-06 EUR-12 EA-07 ISO-00 AID-05 CEQ-01

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FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9736

INFO AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

AMEMBASSY CAPE TOWN

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

AMEMBASSY OSLO

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

AMEMBASSY WARSAW

AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 0683

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: TGEN, XV, AS

SUBJECT: ANTARCTICA: AUSTRALIAN MINISTER OF SCIENCE, WEBSTER

CLAIMS AUST. DOLS. 100 MILLION OIL EXPLORATION

PROJECT ALREADY UNDER WAY IN ANTARCTICA

1. AUSTRALIAN MINISTER FOR SCIENCE, SENATOR WEBSTER, WAS

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INTERVIEWED ON MELBOURNE TELEVISION UPON HIS RETURN FROM A
VISIT TO NEW ZEALAND AND U.S. BASES IN ANTARCTICA AND TALKS
IN CHRISTCHURCH WITH NEW ZEALAND MINISTER FOR SCIENCE, L.W.
GANDAR. SENATOR WEBSTER CLAIMED DURING THE INTERVIEW - AN
ACCOUNT OF WHICH HAS SO FAR BEEN PICKED UP ONLY BY THE
CANBERRA TIMES - THAT "EUROPEAN COUNTRIES WERE SPENDING
DOLS AUST. 100 MILLION IN THE SEARCH FOR OIL OFF NEW

ZEALAND'S ANTARCTIC TERRITORY." THE CANBERRA TIMES REPORTED THAT SENATOR WEBSTER SAID "THAT HE HAD BEEN TOLD THAT A EUROPEAN CONSORTIUM WAS USING THE MOST ADVANCED EXPLORATION TECHNIQUES IN ITS SEARCH FOR OIL AND THAT DRILLING WAS IN PROGRESS IN INTERNATIONAL WATERS WITHIN 160 KILOMETERS OF NEW ZEALAND (ANTARCTIC) TERRITORY." WEBSTER IS ALSO REPORTED BY THE CANBERRA TIMES TO HAVE ADDED THAT "IT IS KNOWN THAT THE UNITED STATES AND THE SOVIET UNION HAVE BEEN DEEPLY INVOLVED IN SUCH WORK."

2. THE CANBERRA TIMES THEN WENT ON TO REPORT THAT IT "HAS BEEN KNOWN FOR SOME TIME THAT VAST AREAS OF THE ANTARCTIC ARE COMMERCIALY VIABLE, PARTICULARLY IN COAL AND FISH. THE SOVIET UNION," THE PAPER CONTINEUS, "HAS FOUND LARGE AREAS OF EXTRACTABLE COAL WHICH CAN BE WON FOR AT LEAST SIX MONTHS OF THE YEAR. THE TAIWANESE HAVE HAD RESEARCH VESSELS IN THE AREA AND ARE EXPECTED TO TAKE A LARGE QUANTITY OF FISH OUT IN THE COMING YEARS."

3. THE CANBERRA TIMES FURTHER QUOTED "GOVERNMENT SOURCES" AS SAYING THAT SENATOR WEBSTER'S COMMENTS "REALIZED AUSTRALIA'S WORST FEARS;" A RUSH TO COMMERCIALY EXPLOIT THE AREA. THE PAPER WENT ON TO QUOTE "ANOTHER GOVERNMENT SOURCE" TO THE EFFECT THAT SOME GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS, ESPECIALLY FOREIGN AFFAIRS, WOULD BE "FAR FROM PLEASED NOW THAT SENATOR WEBSTER HAS BLOWN THE GAFF ON THE ANTARCTIC SITUATION."

4. SENATOR WEBSTER - WHO IS WIDELY DESCRIBED AS "NICE BUT STUPID" - CLEARLY SEEMS TO HAVE MISUNDERSTOOD SOMETHING
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HE WOLD TOLD DURING HIS TRIP TO ANTARCTICA AND NEW ZEALAND. DEPUTYNEW ZEALAND HIGH COMMISSIONER HAS TOLD EMBOFF THAT A CABLE TO WELLINGTON HAS FAILED TO ELICIT ANY INDICATION AS TO WHAT BASIS FOR SENATOR'S MISUNDERSTANDING MIGHT HAVE BEEN. A SOURCE IN AUSTRALIAN DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL RESOURCES HAS BEEN QUOTED AS SAYING THT HE WAS SURPRISED BY SENATOR WEBSTER'S STATEMENT. HE IS FURTHER QUOTED AS HAVING SAID THAT HE WAS "AWARE OF SURVEYS OF VARYING KINDS BEING CARRIED OUT OVER A NUMBER OF YEARS, BUT HE HAD NOT HEARD OF DEVELOPMENTS TO THE ADVANCED STAGE AS OUTLINED BY SENATOR WEBSTER." HE IS REPORTED TOHAVE ADDED THAT ANY DRILLING WHICH WAS UNDERTAKEN IN AN OIL SEARCH WOULD IMMEDIATELY BECOME KNOWN TO OTHERS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD BECAUSE DRILLERS WERE PART OF A VERY CLOSE-KNIT COMMUNITY AND THAT NO SUCH INFORMATION HAD FILTERED THROUGH. THE CANBERRA TIMES CONTINUES WITH THE FOLLOWING WRY REMARK: "HE SAID IT COULD BE ASSUMED THAT 'THERE MUST BE SMOKE' IN THE DISCLOSURES, BUT THAT HE DOUBTED THERE WAS MUCH FIRE BENEATH THE SMOKE." EMBASSY SOURCE IN BRANCH OF DFA WHICH HANDLES ANTARCTICA MATTERS TOLD EMBOFF THAT WHILE

HE MUST OFFICIALLY SAY "NO COMMENT" HE PERSONALLY THOUGHT SENATOR WEBSTER HAD MISUNDERSTOOD AND MISINTERPRETED SOMETHING HE HAD BEEN TOLD CONCERNING OVERALL RESEARCH ACTIVITIES IN ANTARCTICA.

5. IN ANY EVENT, SENATOR WEBSTER SUDDENLY SEEMS TO HAVE CLAMMED UP ON QUESTION OF ANTARCTIC DRILLING ACTIVITIES. THE CANBERRA TIMES REPORTS ON FRIDAY THAT SENATOR "UNAVAILABLE FOR COMMENT" DURING A VISIT TO CANBERRA FOR CABINET DISCUSSIONS AND MINISTERIAL APPOINTMENTS. A SPOKESMAN IS QUOTED AS HAVING SAID THAT SENATOR WEBSTER HAD GIVEN INSTRUCTIONS THAT THERE WAS "NOTHING TO ADD."

6. WE WOULD BE INTERESTED IN ANY ASSESSMENT WELLINGTON IS ABLE TO MAKE AS TO BASIS FOR SENATOR WEBSTER'S "MISUNDERSTANDING."

7 SENATOR WEBSTER'S REMARKS HAVE IN THE EVENT DRAWN FORTH
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STATEMENT ON WOLE QUESTION OF SEPTEMBER ANTARCTIC TREATY MEETING FROM DFA SPOKESMAN WHO IS REPORTED IN FRIDAY'S SYDNEY MORNING HERALD AS HAVING SAID THAT "THERE WAS AN URGENT NEED TO ESTABLISH ENVIRONMENTAL GUIDELINES FOR ANY FUTURE MINERALS DRILLING AND GENERAL EXPLOITATION OF RESOURCES IN THE ANTARCTIC LAND MASS." HE ADDED THAT AUSTRALIA ATTACHED "GREAT IMPORTANCE" TO NEXT SEPTEMBER MEETING IN LONDON AND THAT "FUTURE ANTARCTIC RESOURCE EXPLOITATION IS BECOMING TECHNICALLY MORE FEASIBLE EACH DAY AND THE QUESTIONS IT RAISES ARE INCREASINGLY COMPLEX AS WE NOW HAVE TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT LAW OF THE SEA CONSIDERATIONS." ACCORDING TO H.C. MOTT, ASSISTANT SECRETARY, INFORMATION BRANCH, HERALD REPORT FAIRLY ACCURATELY REFLECTS BRIEFING GIVEN SEVERAL JOURNALISTS BY ONE OF HIS OFFICERS, (PERRY NOLAN), WITH PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE IN ANTARCTIC AFFAIRS.
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ALREADY UNDER WAY IN ANTARCTICA
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